

THE REAL LIFE

EXCELLENCE

FACTOR



OUR  
VERY OWN  
REAL LIFE  
STARS



Annual Review

Real Life Options

a real choice | a real voice | a real difference

**“EVERY DAY  
WE SUPPORT  
SOMEBODY IS  
A DAY OUT OF  
THEIR LIVES –  
WE’VE GOT TO  
GET IT RIGHT  
EVERY TIME.”**

**David Wandless,  
Founder of Real Life Options**

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# EXPANDING ON OUR STARS' STORIES

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# EXTENDING

## A WARM WELCOME



Social Care seems to “lurch” from one big crisis to another; financial challenges, Regulator changes and the fall out from “yet another scandal” in the media seems to be always present. The pressure on organisations, on staff and the people whose lives we are involved in continues to rise. All of us who work, volunteer or know people who do, have at some time asked “**is it really worth it?**”

**“THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY REAL LIFE OPTIONS’ STAFF ARE NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER.”**

Azra and David



The simple answer is **Yes** – it is too important not to be worth it! The services provided by Real Life Options’ staff are needed now more than ever. The next few years won’t see this challenging backdrop change. We can’t keep providing services the way we have up until now, but the good news is that **Real Life Options has always been in a state of change.**

We will have to redesign some delivery models, some buildings will need to close or be renovated and we will need to acquire new skills.

**Partnership work and volunteering** will become features of successful social care providers and those that are strongly linked to other community resources, such as churches, interest groups and education, will be better placed to thrive.

Azra Kirkby  
Interim Chief Executive

During 2016/2017, the Executive Management Team and the Board of Management will be holding some of our meetings in regional offices. In the afternoons we will be inviting colleagues, people we support and families to come and **talk to us about key challenges and opportunities** that are facing the organisation. These will include recruitment, recognition and reward, the use of technology and volunteers and will help us make **better decisions** moving forward.

Your Service Manager and Area Manager will be able to give you the dates. We do hope that you can join us. **It has been a hard year but we have continued to move forward and, for that, we thank you.**

Yours sincerely

David Wilkin  
Chair



# CONRAD'S EXHILARATING PARACHUTE JUMP

**"It was ABSOLUTELY AWESOME"**  
Conrad

WE RAISED  
**£1,500**  
FOR A LOCAL  
COMPUTER  
PROJECT



## The sky's not the limit

### Conrad takes a leap of faith to raise money for the people we support

Thrill seeker Conrad recently achieved a life-long ambition with an epic charity parachute jump.

Adrenaline junkie Conrad Davies, a person we support from Billingham, was thrilled when he got the opportunity to do the parachute jump and take the leap out of a plane at over 10,000 feet.

Much to his credit, Conrad successfully persuaded former Real Life Options Chief Executive Brian Hutchinson to join him in his bold challenge. The pair took the leap together at Teesside Airport Jump Centre, marking not only the first parachute jump for both men, but also the first time Conrad had ever been in a plane!

Speaking of the jump, Conrad said: "It was absolutely awesome! I just couldn't wait to do the jump, I was so excited! I loved the whole thing, it was brilliant and the views were incredible too. I'm so thankful to John Raymond Appleby for his kind generosity in donating the money for the jump which allowed me to fulfil my life-long dream."

Brian added: "I loved it! It was such a fantastic experience, definitely the best thing I've ever done!" The pair smashed their fundraising target and raised over £1,500, all of which will go to support a new Real Life Options initiative – a local computer project to aid the people we support, headed up by Conrad himself.



**"I WAS SO EXCITED"**  
Conrad





# THE EXEMPLARY ARTISTIC TALENTS OF DOUGLAS, GORDON AND STEPHEN

WE HOSTED OUR OWN ART EXHIBITION

"I LIKED DOING THE PAINTINGS"  
Douglas



## Art proves truly limitless

### Inspiring art exhibition showcases outstanding artistic talent

An incredible range of imaginative artwork was proudly displayed at the pioneering 'Limitless' art exhibition in Scotland.

The three talented artists Douglas Hutcheson, Gordon Weir and Stephen Mitchell, who are all supported by Real Life Options, produced a stunning range of artwork to showcase, including beautiful paintings and impressive stone sculptures.

Limitless was the brainchild of Support Worker Priyanka Shriram who had the vision to host an exhibition after witnessing the creative talent the three men displayed.

The well-attended exhibition attracted over 100 visitors and over 20 paintings were sold. However, even more importantly it provided a great opportunity for the artists to express themselves, meet new people and build relationships. Their artwork showcased their wonderful talent and really gave them a voice so people could get a true appreciation of their creativity.

Paul Tansey, Service Manager commented: "The show was incredibly inspiring and moving. It was so much more than just an art exhibition, it was a celebration of the guys themselves. It was a beautiful thing to be a part of, proving that limitations are indeed all in our minds."

Reflecting on the show, Douglas said: "I liked doing the paintings and I liked meeting new people." Fellow artist Stephen commented: "It was great!" with artist Gordon adding that the best thing about the event was the achievement of selling his pictures.

"It was GREAT"  
Stephen





I AM A  
PUBLIC  
SPEAKER

STEPH'S PRESENTING  
EXTRAVAGANZA

"It made me  
feel really  
**PROUD**"  
Steph



## Presenting with confidence

### Steph takes the stage to deliver a moving speech at high-profile ARC conference

Enthusiastic presenter Steph Bell showed true star quality speaking at the conference, hot on the heels of winning a Leeds dance competition.

Presenting in front of large crowds can be a daunting prospect, but Steph, a person we support from Leeds, took it all in her stride when she spoke at an ARC conference, addressing over 60 delegates. The ARC conference, ran in partnership with Real Life Options, aimed to raise awareness of the Care Act and its impact on social care providers.

Accompanied by Support Worker Therese, Steph travelled over 60 miles to Chesterfield to speak at the conference about how important music and dancing are in her life and to her general wellbeing. She excitedly told the audience about the thrill of winning first prize in a recent Leeds dance competition dressed as Catwoman, beating over 30 other hopefuls.

Reminiscing about the conference, Steph said: "I felt quite shy and nervous beforehand, but was fine when I started talking. It was really good to go to the conference and meet so many people. It made me feel really proud afterwards, I'd definitely do it again!"

Tracy Connelly, Area Manager, added: "Steph was brilliant - I'm thrilled she's had a chance to say a little about what's important to her."

"I'm so proud of Steph and everything she has achieved," agreed Jackie Kirton, Service Manager, "She truly is a star."



STEPH WAS  
BRILLIANT"  
Tracy





I LED A RECRUITMENT PANEL

# HOLLY'S INTERVIEWING EXPERTISE

"I was PROUD of the team and myself"  
Holly



## Asking all the right questions

### Holly expertly leads the Scottish Advisory Board in crucial recruitment process

When Real Life Options needed to hire a new Non-Executive Director, they knew who to call – the Scottish Advisory Board, led by Holly Baxter.

Holly, a person we support from Buckie, was recently elected as Chair of the Scottish Advisory Board, which is made up of people we support and their Support Workers and has the responsibility to consider, advise and discuss the development of services in Scotland.

The Board were at the centre of the important recruitment of the Non-Executive Director. Ever the professional, Holly expertly led the process from the very first meetings in Glasgow right through to the final interviews in Edinburgh. She was diligent in making sure that the interviews ran to schedule, was firm in making sure the right questions were asked and ensured everyone had their say on the final decision.

Reflecting on the interview process, Holly said: "I was proud of the team and myself. We knew what we were doing as we had all practised and thought carefully about what we wanted from the people we were interviewing. I think we asked some tough, but fair, questions of the candidates."

She continued: "I really enjoyed listening to the presentations each candidate made. It's been a hard decision for us to make but I think we have chosen the right person."

"I THINK WE ASKED SOME TOUGH, BUT FAIR, QUESTIONS OF THE CANDIDATES"  
Holly



# ELLEN'S EXCEPTIONAL PERSONALISED PROJECT



**"Everyone felt truly INSPIRED"**

Jean

**I RAN MY FIRST PILOT PROJECT**



## Taking person-centred one step further

### Ellen co-ordinates pioneering Personalising Homecare pilot project

1st Homecare, along with parent company Real Life Options, is already well known for being person-centred, but even we recognise that things can always be improved further.

The Personalising Homecare project achieved just that – optimising the person-centred approach and taking it to the next level. Led by Ellen Ewart, a Care Co-ordinator at 1st Homecare, the pilot project ran in conjunction with the Dumfries and Galloway Council. It involved building upon person-centred principles and utilising Helen Sanderson tools.

Current approaches were readdressed and more individualised care plans were put in place to provide better outcomes for everyone. For example, for one gentleman with Multiple Sclerosis, a variety of new exercises were introduced to strengthen his leg muscles, increasing his mobility and independence.

Ellen co-ordinated the intensive project as both a trainer and a mentor and built up a great relationship with the council commissioner. Described as 'thought-provoking and energising' the incredibly successful project was testament to Ellen's commitment. Jean Lind, Area Manager, described Ellen as "responsive and fully involved" in the project and added "after the training everyone felt truly inspired."

"The highlight for me was hearing all the positive feedback," shared Ellen. "I had a great team assisting me with the project. It was hard work but worth it. It made me feel really proud."



**"IT WAS HARD WORK BUT WORTH IT"**

Ellen





**“There’s always something YOU CAN DO”**  
Colleen

**I FIGHT FOR OUR PEOPLE’S RIGHTS**

**COLLEEN ALWAYS GOES THE**

**EXTRA MILE**



## Fighting her corner

### Colleen stands her ground to fight for the rights of the people we support

Not everyone is able to fight for their own rights, but Colleen Conn is determined to always stand up for justice.

Colleen, a Senior Support Worker from Derbyshire, fought tirelessly for a lady supported by Real Life Options who she believed was not getting the service she was entitled to from the NHS. Despite battling since 2009 for a cataract operation, doctors remained quite dismissive. Colleen remained positive and explored different routes with other health professionals to ensure a positive outcome.

Colleen also bravely represented the lady at a large hospital meeting and ensured that Support Workers were able to accompany her in hospital as she had very specific communication needs, which the doctors just couldn't understand.

Speaking about the situation, Colleen said: “There’s always something you can do. You know in your heart what’s morally right. You’ve got to always try and put yourself in their shoes and consider how you’d want to be treated yourself. It wasn’t just me who was the hero. It was the whole team, everyone went an extra mile and fought for her rights. It was absolutely a team effort.”

Team Co-ordinator Sarah Copley added: “We have seen first-hand the passion and determination Colleen brings to working with her clients and fighting for everything they need.”

**“WE HAVE SEEN FIRST-HAND THE PASSION AND DETERMINATION COLLEEN BRINGS”**

Sarah





I WROTE FOR OUR COMPANY MAGAZINE

"I could not stop SMILING"  
Tristen



TRISTEN'S FANTASTIC REPORTING EXPERIENCE



## Wrestling with writing

### Tristen turns undercover reporter for Real News writing about his recent wrestling trip

When Tristen Rankine, a person we support from Dunfermline, went to his first wrestling match he felt compelled to share his experience, so he did just that and wrote an inspiring article for the Real News company magazine.

As part of an ongoing initiative to empower people and give them a voice, the Real News magazine provides a perfect platform to showcase contributions from the people we support, be that their stories, art, photography or even their writing.

The editorial team is always on the lookout for keen writers to contribute and Tristen jumped at the chance to share his joyful recollection of his first live wrestling experience.

In his passionate, moving account, Tristen wrote: "I had a good view of the ring and I could not stop smiling! It started and all my favourite WWE superstars came out to fight... I was so happy I had seen them."

His article will be published in the first Real News magazine in 2016.

Sam Goodwin, Marketing and Communications Manager said: "Tristen's article was superbly written. His passion really shines through and his attention to detail was great. Hopefully he will be a trend-setter and will inspire other people we support to contribute to the magazine as well – perhaps by writing their own article or even sharing their art, photography or poetry."

"HOPEFULLY HE WILL BE A TREND-SETTER"  
Sam





**"I really enjoy WORKING"**  
Peter

**INSPIRE OTHERS**

# PETER'S EXCELLENT PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT



An inspiration to us all

## Peter takes charge of his fantastic personal development

No challenge is too great for self-motivated Peter Maxwell, a person we support at Orchard Care in Coventry.

Over the last few years Peter has impressed everyone around him with his constant commitment and dedication to his own personal development. Whereas in the past he had lots of anger issues and was consequently prescribed a lot of medication, now he is completely prescription-free after successfully developing a number of strategies to keep himself calm. After committing to anger management courses and weekly art therapy Peter has developed his own coping mechanisms for controlling his temper and is confident in walking away from demanding situations.

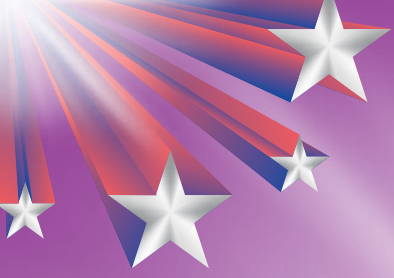
Nowadays Peter is taking great pride in contributing to his local community and for over three years has been faithfully working at a Coventry Mind charity shop supporting better mental health. "I really enjoy working at the shop," said Peter speaking about his job role.

He has also stepped out in faith at his local church and confidently delivered bible readings stood in front of the whole congregation. In addition, he's been getting active, taking up regular swimming and weekly walks with his mother. After helping out in the kitchen, he's now keen to develop his culinary skills and plans to learn how to cook and bake in 2016.

"Peter's transformation from a few years ago is outstanding," said James Dawson, Support Worker. "He's like a completely different person. He's such a fantastic success story, a great example of what can be achieved."

**"HIS TRANSFORMATION IS OUTSTANDING"**  
James



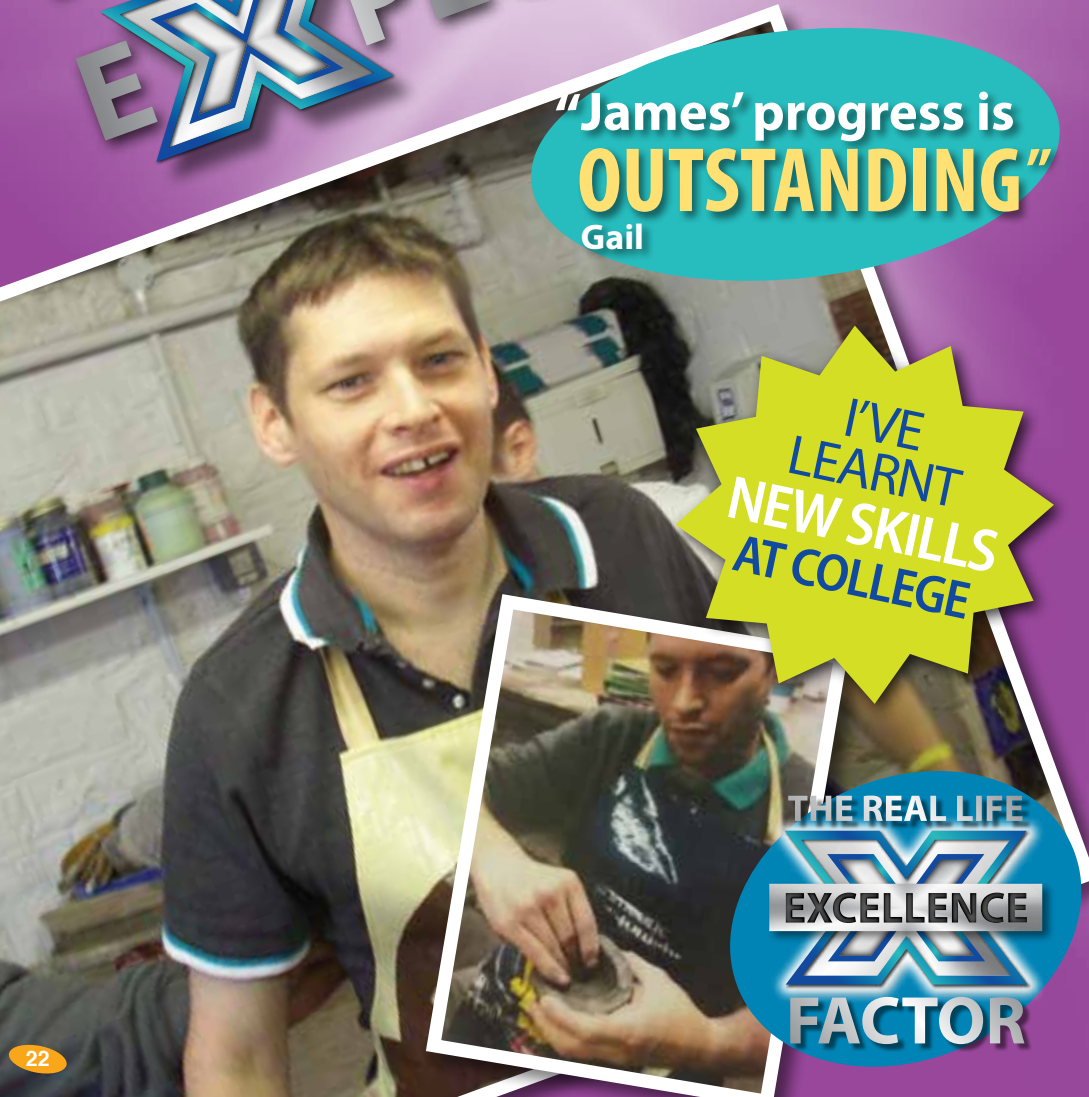


# JAMES ALWAYS EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

**"James' progress is OUTSTANDING"**

Gail

**I'VE LEARNT NEW SKILLS AT COLLEGE**



## Improving confidence with college

### James always pushes the boundaries to learn and develop new skills

James Gilmartin, a person we support from Wales, has progressed leaps and bounds since signing up to numerous college courses.

Always keen to further his knowledge, James has been passionate about attending Oxford House Risca College in Newport for the past three years. During that time James has been committed to trying a diverse range of interesting courses, including arts and crafts, cookery, animal welfare and computer literacy.

"James' progress is outstanding," said Gail Sherrard, Service Manager. "He has grown incredibly in confidence and is much better at social interaction. Going to college has also really helped to reduce his anxiety levels and he has mastered some fantastic new skills, such as helping prepare cooked meals and writing his own CV for his quest to get back into the workplace."

James' residential service in Wales is currently in a transition programme to convert to a supported living establishment and Gail couldn't be prouder of his involvement in the process. "James is really thrilled about his new home and is looking forward to decorating it. It will have much more of a community feel and there are more opportunities for social inclusion as it's less remote. It's closer to the college too, which is great for James. We're very excited about what the future holds."



**"HE HAS MASTERED SOME FANTASTIC NEW SKILLS"**

Gail





# JENETTE'S EXCELLENT CHAS ACCREDITATION

MY HEALTH AND SAFETY ACCREDITATION

"I really enjoy HELPING PEOPLE"  
Jenette

THE REAL LIFE EXCELLENCE FACTOR

## Always putting others first

### Jenette leads the way to CHAS accreditation

Jenette Parker, PA Support and Facilities Assistant, embodies all the positive values associated with Real Life Options. She is incredibly passionate, friendly and organised and never ceases to put the needs of the people we support first.

Recently Jenette confidently led Real Life Options through the extensive CHAS accreditation process. The comprehensive project involved providing detailed evidence for all the health and safety policies and procedures in place. Despite this not being her main area of expertise this is the third year Jenette has led the CHAS process, taking on a significant amount of work to support her colleagues to achieve this important accreditation. Even the CHAS assessor recognised her hard work, praising her "excellent standard of presentation."

She recently won a Real Life Hero Award for her unfailing commitment to the job, with colleagues commenting that she is always genuinely cheerful and a delight to be around and does an amazing job of making sure everyone is organised, even when she is being pulled in every direction imaginable.

"I really enjoy helping people and keeping them on track when they are looking for guidance," said Jenette. "I'm one of the main points of contact for visitors to Head Office, including people we support, and I love making sure everyone gets a warm, friendly welcome to help them have a great experience."





## Some jolly good days out

### Birmingham staff team organise a multitude of interesting day trips to motivate and inspire the people we support

From Blackpool to Doctor Who, the inspiration for thought-provoking day trips is at an all time high in our Birmingham services.

Support Workers across the region continually demonstrate whole-hearted dedication and commitment in organising a range of different day trips to meet the needs of the people we support.

Most recently Support Workers Sarah Mills and Robert Weston assisted Derek and Mark on a fun day trip to Blackpool where they got to enjoy all the tourist delights, including visiting Blackpool Tower, seeing the Pier, going on the rides and having a trip to the seaside.

Elsewhere David Bradley was thrilled to visit the renowned Doctor Who Experience in Cardiff, accompanied by Support Workers Sue Barnett and Maxine Najah. Plus Dilys, Ada and Jean were thrilled to go to the pantomime to enjoy an entertaining evening out watching Aladdin at the Hippodrome in Birmingham.

“There’s so many benefits from good days out,” said Carroll Nichols, Service Manager. “They provide a great opportunity to integrate with the community and give a wonderful change of scenery. It’s fantastic to see how excited the people we support get and how they love retelling stories from their trips afterwards.”

“It’s important that everyone experiences the simple pleasures they are entitled to and we have a great, committed staff team who work tirelessly to ensure that happens.”

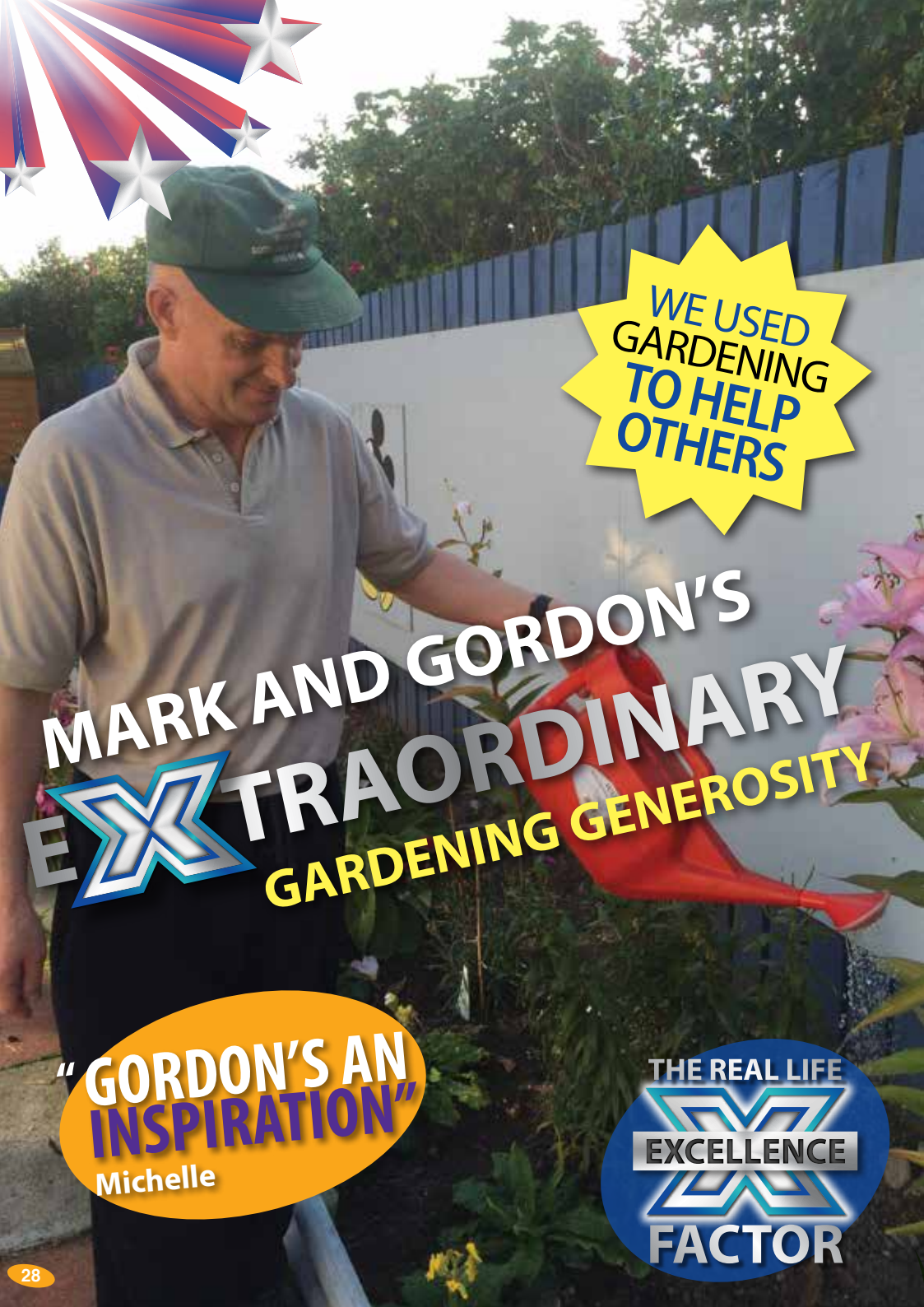
**WE’VE LED INSPIRING TRIPS**

# BIRMINGHAM’S EXCITING DAY TRIPS

**“A great opportunity to INTEGRATE WITH THE COMMUNITY.”**  
Carroll



**“WE HAVE A GREAT, COMMITTED STAFF TEAM.”**  
Carroll



**WE USED GARDENING TO HELP OTHERS**

# MARK AND GORDON'S EXTRAORDINARY GARDENING GENEROSITY

**"GORDON'S AN INSPIRATION"**  
Michelle



## Reaping the benefits

### Mark and Gordon transform their gardens and rejuvenate community spirit

Mark Hinton and Gordon Bennett, who are both supported by Real Life Options, certainly share one great passion: gardening.

This green-fingered duo have been busy putting their gardening expertise to great use and have been hard at work gardening, recycling and growing a glorious range of vegetables and fruit.

Gordon has been developing his gardening skills for years, gaining a SVQ in Gardening. He has now stepped up to maintain the majority of the service gardens in Portlethen, in addition to helping out in the local church and day centre gardens.

"Gordon's an inspiration," says Michelle Nicholson, Service Manager. "He's happiest when he's outside in his garden. He really enjoys what he does and he loves helping others and giving something back to the community."

Meanwhile in Glasgow, Mark has been overhauling his own garden, planting an extensive range of vegetables and gathering recyclable materials to build a compost bin.

He has borrowed tools from the Shettleston Community Garden team and sourced wooden pallets from his local supermarkets for garden construction work.

Reflecting on his motivation, Mark said: "I want to be healthy and the exercise and fresh vegetables will help me get healthier and healthier. Plus I want to help my local community – we can recycle materials to improve our gardens and keep the place tidy."

**"I want to help my LOCAL COMMUNITY"**  
Mark



# OUR EXCEPTIONAL YEAR IN NUMBERS

The success stories of our very own stars still only provide a small snapshot of the exceptional work that's been going on at Real Life Options across the UK over the past year.

Although it's most certainly the people that make Real Life Options the great organisation it is – it would still be helpful to share with you our year in numbers so you can get an idea of the scale of our operations and the benefits it brings to the people we support at this moment in time.

Providing you with key information about our growth, income and turnover is however only a small part of a larger picture. Behind every number is a person and behind every person is a story. Our highlights are best understood when each and every person shares their own personal story. Stories of achieving more than they ever thought possible. Stories of gaining true independence. Stories of enjoying independent lives surrounded by supportive staff, family and friends. Stories of living life to the full.

All of us here at Real Life Options whole-heartedly believe that every single person we support is a star in their own right. And we exist as an organisation to make a difference in their lives and help them shine even brighter.

## THE FACTS AND FIGURES



Annual turnover remains at **over £40m** in 2015-16. The Real Life Options Group has worked closely with Local Authorities in the last year to meet the needs of the people we support and have had success in providing more cost-effective services.



This year the Real Life Options Group provided support to **1,712** people.







THANK YOU  
TO ALL OUR  
REAL LIFE STARS!  
WE'VE HAD AN  
EXCEPTIONAL  
YEAR



## Head Office:

David Wandless House  
A1 Business Park  
Knottingley Road  
Knottingley  
West Yorkshire WF11 0BU



CONTRACTORS HEALTH & SAFETY ASSOCIATION  
Accredited Contractor  
www.has.co.uk



Association for Real Change



VOODG



MEMBER



Tel: 01977 781800



Email: [info@reallifeoptions.org](mailto:info@reallifeoptions.org)



[www.reallifeoptions.org](http://www.reallifeoptions.org)

